

## Oral Testimony for House Committee on Homeland Security

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Statement of Jack Reall

Captain

Columbus, Ohio Fires Division and President of the Columbus Fire Fighters Union

Good Morning Gentleman and Gentle ladies,

I am Jack Reall, Captain in the Columbus, Ohio, Fire Division and President of the Columbus Fire Fighters Union.

I am here before you today to offer testimony on the status of Homeland Security Training and its impact on my members and colleagues. DHS Funding provides opportunities all over the country in a variety of formats. However, it is generally divided into two specific areas; National Training Facilities and State and Local Grants.

National Training Facilities provided high quality and high impact training opportunities, but they have some efficiency issues. The Noble Training Facility in Anniston, Alabama offers a unique training environment utilizing chem-bio terrorist live agents. The Nevada Test Site utilizes radiological facilities to create a real-world scenario-based environment that would be unfamiliar to most first responders. The Tunnel in West Virginia also offers environmental issues that have only been experienced at the World Trade Center and are usually not able to be recreated for training. Although each of these facilities, and the others I did not mention, has benefits to first-responders, their impact is minimal. Why?...because most of our first responders do not have access to these facilities. Staffing concerns at home inhibit our ability to attend these worthwhile sessions. Even though these programs are free, they cause considerable costs to our jurisdictions that eliminate opportunities. Even if our fire fighters took their own vacation time to attend these facilities, many localities would be hard pressed to allow for the leave due to increased costs of staffing. Less than one-half of one percent of my members has participated in training at any of the national facilities.

The National Fire Academy is another story. They have a long-standing relationship with State and Local Training Academies and stretch the dollars as far as they possibly can. They have added benefits of being able to share training development initiatives with local training academies and give a synergistic effect to every dollar being spent. However, even the National Fire Academy has drawbacks. Again, they have the same staffing issues as the other National Facilities. They also focus much of their impact on the management aspect of the Fire Service. Not that this is bad. We all are aware that effective management will result in better performance at even the lowest level. However, our firefighters responding every day to tens of thousands of emergencies nationwide need to be directly impacted by our Homeland Security dollars. The National Fire Academy offers a cost-effective and useful indirect impact of these monies. State and Local Grants to provide training are also an opportunity for many of our First Responders. However, they are not consistent in quality and in curriculum. Many of these courses do not meet nationally accepted criteria or consensus-based standards. Additionally, many of these grants are mis-administered by State Agencies and without adequate intervention by the Office of Domestic Preparedness, inconsistencies arise that inhibit training. As an example, I have instructed Structural Collapse Rescue techniques to first responders throughout the Nation. I developed the curriculum and mechanism for training Ohio's First Responders. I utilized the same exact program for another state. Inconsistencies with administration of ODP and DHS funding mechanisms have caused Ohio's State Agency administering these funds to deny the training to First Responders while the other state has funded 8 classes in 90 days. These

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inefficiencies lead most firefighters to believe that there is no overall strategy for the effective utilization of these funds.

It is apparent to me that the overemphasis on grant processes and guidelines has caused us to “get the process right, yet lose the progress.”

My observations are that, regardless of the mechanism, too little training is making its way to the frontline firefighters and first responders. Too much emphasis is placed on specialty training programs and niche opportunities, while our tens of thousands of firefighters continue to put their lives on the line everyday with little or no additional training on Homeland Security Issues. Quality and consistency of those training programs that are offered and provided through our Federal Funding mechanism are across the spectrum. Much of the State and Local Grants, State “pass-through” funding and UASI grants are over utilized for everyday law enforcement operations with little left over for other members of the first responder community.

As a Union President, I make an attempt to absolve the stereotype of just being the naysayer who identifies problems. I try to offer solutions to every problem. My recommendations are based on what I feel has worked for my members. The last WMD training that all of our firefighters participated in was the 120 Cities training provided as a part of the Nunn-Lugar-Dominici Act. Since then, we have had sporadic participation in WMD training for first responders. I felt this program worked because it brought quality, consistent, high-impact training to us. Our staffing impact was minimized due to the fact that our firefighters were still available should a catastrophic event occur. We also did not have to backfill for travel days and allocate resources for shift changes to allow for out of town training. This was the most effective type of training for the dollar spent. It is much more effective to pay for the travel and lodging of a few instructors versus the travel and lodging of many students. Most businesses have utilized this method for training employees for years. This training should be administered nationally and delivered locally. This assures consistency and quality. It also allows for a broad overview of the effectiveness of the training. Firefighters and other first responders nationwide would be able to be evaluated on the effectiveness of the training everyday, rather than just with an annual exercise in one area of the country involving a few hundred responders. By utilizing this method of training for the majority of the programs and opportunities also allows for a more quick, concise, and accurate determination that funding is being provided to the first responder groups that need it most.

I ask that you consider my thoughts and recommendations when providing direction for future funding of National Training Programs through the use of taxpayer money. Every taxpayer in the Nation contributes to this revenue source, therefore every first responder to those taxpayers should be afforded these training programs.

Thank you.